

R.M.U. USE ONLY
PROBLEM STATEMENT NO:
DATE OF RECEIPT:



STAGE I RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

I. PROBLEM TITLE:

Impacts of Increased Canadian Economic Development on Northern Montana Highways

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Recent economic developments in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan are generating changes in commercial traffic across border crossings into Montana and along associated north-south highway corridors. In response to these developments, area elected officials and other leaders are calling for expanded port services and have asked MDT and its provincial counterparts to improve highways on these corridors.

There is a need to provide an assessment of current conditions, estimate commercial traffic through the ports given scenarios for existing and expanded port services, and consider the impact of the increased traffic on the need for highway improvements. The scope of this study is limited to north-south highway corridors leading to the seven ports served by paved highways between the Port of Coultts-Sweet Grass and the Port of Regway-Raymond. These highways are Secondary Highways 232, 233, 241, and 511, US Highway 191, and Montana Highways 24 and 13.

The research problem will be addressed in two phases. Phase I will include an assessment of current and future economic conditions and an estimate of related commercial vehicle traffic growth with and without expanded port operations. Phase II, if warranted, would identify highway impacts of the future traffic and necessary improvements along the corridors leading to the ports.

III. RESEARCH PROPOSED:

This proposal is envisioned as a first phase of research. The primary goal is to examine current and future developments to estimate related changes in commercial vehicle traffic volumes at the ports and their associated highway corridors. This research will help MDT assess and prioritize transportation needs and provide useful information to inform federal decisions on port operations. There are two tasks in Phase I of research.

1. **Assess existing conditions**, including:
 - Energy and other developments in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana,
 - Commercial transportation demand and its recent growth along paved cross-border corridors north and immediately south of US Highway 2 between the Port of Coultts-Sweet Grass and the Port of Regway-Raymond,
 - Current highway conditions, and
 - Ports of entry operational and capacity characteristics and federal issues relating to port service expansion.
2. **Estimate future commercial traffic volumes.** Future traffic volumes should be estimated using the ports' current operating schedules as well as 24-hour and other possible operation scenarios. Although energy-related development is responsible for the primary growth in this region, other sectors will also be examined. How and where is traffic expected to change?

Phase II of research (not included in this proposal) would assess the need for highway improvements for the corridors analyzed in Phase I based on the forecast future commercial traffic volumes.

IV. IT COMPONENT: Identify if the project includes an IT component (purchasing of IT hardware, development of databases, acquisition of existing applications, etc) or not. If so, describe IT component in as much detail as possible.

We anticipate no new technology needs from this research project. The researchers may need to purchase proprietary economic data that MDT does not subscribe to.

V. URGENCY AND EXPECTED BENEFITS:

This research is timely, as economic development in Alberta and Saskatchewan is likely to generate continued growth in north-south commercial traffic and could create development potential in underdeveloped parts of central and eastern Montana. MDT needs to consider the effects of increased commercial truck traffic on these emerging corridors and how this growth will affect Montana's transportation systems. The work will enhance the capacity of local authorities to work toward local and regional economic development goals, inform MDT and Montana Transportation Commission decisions, and provide data that can be used by federal agencies to determine future port needs.

Future selection and development of specific highway projects to address impacts and needs identified by a possible future Phase II will depend on available funding and the completion of required Federal and State planning, environmental, and design processes. These processes will include technical analysis and public involvement.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:

The project is expected to be contracted. Phase I would provide the information necessary to determine whether forecast volumes justify Phase II research to analyze highway impacts and improvement needs.

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Note: Submitter may attach continuation sheets if necessary.